



New Zealand Permanent Mission to the United Nations

Te Māngai o Aotearoa

United Nations General Assembly: First Committee discussion - national statement

New Zealand Statement delivered by Permanent Representative, Craig Hawke

16 October 2020

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY



The New Zealand Delegation warmly welcomes you Ambassador Santos as Chair of this year's First Committee. We have complete confidence in your ability to lead our Committee's deliberations notwithstanding the unusual circumstances in which we find ourselves and the extraordinary format of this year's Committee meetings.

New Zealand fully endorses the recent message of the UN High Representative for Disarmament that: "The work of disarmament, like the response to COVID-19, is a global project in which we each share the deepest stake."

New Zealand was pleased to have had the opportunity to welcome High Representative Nakamitsu to Wellington in March this year. Ms Nakamitsu's visit was a useful opportunity for us to engage on the "global project" of disarmament. The visit was timed to coincide with the convening of a Parliamentary Symposium on Nuclear Disarmament and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

Nuclear Disarmament

It is seventy-five years now since the world first witnessed the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of the use of nuclear weapons. The two cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were obliterated at that point. Each with the use of just one bomb. Hundreds of thousands died with unimaginable suffering for others lasting over successive generations.

It is all too evident that with the expanded power of twenty-first century nuclear weapons, no state, group of states or international organisation could realistically prepare for the certain death and devastation that would be left in the wake of a nuclear holocaust today.

If we cannot prepare, we must prevent.

The need to do everything in our power to prevent any further use of nuclear weapons has been a key factor in New Zealand's strong support for the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. We welcome the Treaty's imminent entry-into-force and urge all States not yet party to it to join the Treaty and strengthen its global prohibition.

Our support for the Prohibition Treaty draws upon our long-standing commitment to the NPT which celebrated a full half-century of operation earlier this year. We are hopeful that COVID-related conditions will enable the 2020 NPT Review Conference to be rescheduled at an appropriate time next year.

We take this opportunity to underline – alongside our New Agenda Coalition (NAC) colleagues – the utmost importance of progress on all elements of the NPT's implementation and in particular on Article VI of the Treaty relating to nuclear disarmament.

Progress on nuclear disarmament will be essential to securing a successful outcome at the forthcoming Review Conference. Options for such progress under the label of "Stepping

Stones for Advancing Nuclear Disarmament” have been identified by our Stockholm 16 grouping.

The De-alerting Group to which New Zealand also belongs will again present its resolution to this year’s General Assembly. The Group is calling for the lowered operational readiness of nuclear weapons as part of an outcome from the Review Conference.

Above all it will be important that the Nuclear Weapon States are able to convey a clear sense to all States Parties of their commitment to engage in the multilateral disarmament negotiations envisaged in Article VI of the Treaty. And to convey their intention to do so at the earliest opportunity.

Doing this Mr Chair will be the best means to “halt the decay of the disarmament architecture” and “rebuild trust in nuclear disarmament processes” as stated by the Panel of the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists. Most importantly it will both sustain the health of the Treaty and the commitment of its Parties to it, as well as reducing the actual risk of a nuclear holocaust.

Chemical Weapons

As we worry about the risk of any use of nuclear weapons Mr Chair New Zealand has watched with horror as another Weapon of Mass Destruction - chemical weapons – has been used. And repeatedly so. Most recently the poisoning of Alexi Navalny has raised very serious concerns.

Any use of chemical weapons anywhere, by anyone, under any circumstances is unacceptable and a violation of international law. We cannot allow this behaviour to become normalised or for the Chemical Weapons Convention to be undermined.

It is imperative that we ensure accountability and end impunity for each and every use of these outlawed weapons. In this regard New Zealand strongly supports the efforts of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons to identify and investigate those responsible for the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic.

Missiles

Earlier this month New Zealand completed its year serving as the Chair of the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR). Quite a number of the activities we had planned as Chair were regrettably constrained by the advent of COVID-19.

We have now passed the torch to Austria but alongside them and the Russian Federation who will assume the chairmanship after Austria, we will remain as part of the troika arrangement to ensure continuity to MTCR discussions.

More generally while retaining our full support for the MTCR, we accept the desirability of the international community addressing missile-related issues in a more comprehensive fashion than has previously been the case. In this regard we acknowledge the need for an appropriate framing preferably within the UN in which to do so.

It is a matter of serious concern that there remain no multilateral legally-binding arrangements governing missiles. As High Representative Nakamitsu has recently emphasised, there is even a dearth of universally-agreed definitions or agreement on the key characteristics of missile systems.

Heightened concern regarding the security implications of missiles has been a key factor underlying New Zealand's support over the past two years for research conducted by UNIDIR into the security context of hypersonic missiles. It is also a factor in our welcoming of Germany's convening of an informal Missile Dialogue Initiative in partnership now with the International Institute for Strategic Studies.

Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas (EWIPA)

The need for human security and the better protection of civilians caught up in urban warfare are the key factors underlying New Zealand's strong support for the development of a Political Declaration relating to the use of explosive weapons in populated areas (EWIPA). We thank Ireland for its current leadership of this work.

The need for effective action in this context cannot be overstated. In 2019 90% of casualties from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas were civilians compared with a casualty rate of around 15% from these weapons in all other areas.

The Political Declaration must address the humanitarian harm arising from the use of explosive weapons in urban areas and strengthen compliance with International Humanitarian Law (IHL).

Cluster Munitions Convention

New Zealand's enduring support for IHL and the protection of civilians also informs our position as a strong supporter of the Convention on Cluster Munitions (CCM), including in our role as its Coordinator for National Implementation Measures.

While we are reassured to learn that the number of casualties caused by cluster munitions has decreased in recent years, that number still remains too high. And the percentage of civilians within that number whereby 99% of all cluster munition casualties are civilians is unacceptable.

There has been no new use of cluster munitions by any of the 110 States Parties to the CCM since it was adopted in 2008. We condemn without reservation the continued use of these indiscriminate and inhumane weapons in Syria. And we are alarmed at reports earlier this

month of new cluster munition usage in Nagorno-Karabakh. We urge all States not yet party to the CCM to commit to the prohibition of cluster munitions by joining this Convention.

Arms Trade Treaty

Mr Chair,

As a Pacific state New Zealand is well aware of the social economic and humanitarian consequences associated with the illicit trade in conventional arms. SDG Target 16.4 reflects the need to significantly reduce illicit arms flows.

The Arms Trade Treaty's strengthened regulation of conventional arms will contribute to international and regional security and to the reduction of human suffering in all parts of the globe.

Alongside universalisation, implementation of the Treaty is key to the realisation of our goals and aspirations for it. As the current Chair of the ATT's Voluntary Trust Fund, New Zealand is keen to ensure that the Fund is easily accessible to all States wishing to apply for its assistance in improving implementation. One of our current focuses in this respect is the production of a suite of You-Tube-style videos providing insights on how to submit a high quality proposal to the Fund.

We expect Mr Chair to be in a position very shortly to provide a further grant to the Trust Fund. The grant will be tagged specifically for Pacific projects reflecting the priority we place on advancing the Treaty in our immediate region.

At the same time New Zealand is separately meeting bilateral requests from a number of our Pacific neighbours to assist them, particularly via the adoption of legislation, in reaping the benefits of ATT implementation.

In conclusion Mr Chair New Zealand will continue to set great store by the progress the international community has made in putting in place the current network of multilateral treaties and obligations relating both to Weapons of Mass Destruction as well as conventional weapons.

But there remains much work for the international community still to do. There are gaps in the coverage of existing instruments. And there are gaps with respect to the universalisation, implementation and compliance with instruments we already have in place.

Nonetheless we share High Representative Nakamitsu's belief that "if we draw the right lessons from this immensely challenging period we will emerge with renewed faith that we can cooperatively tackle our greatest common challenges".

Thank you, Mr. Chair.